

**ACADEMIC SENATE
of
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
San Luis Obispo, CA**

AS-759-13

RESOLUTION ON STUDENT EVALUATIONS

1 WHEREAS, The 2012-2014 CSU-CFA Collective Bargaining Agreement states that “[w]ritten
2 or electronic student questionnaire evaluations shall be required for all faculty unit
3 employees who teach” (15.15); and
4

5 WHEREAS, The Collective Bargaining Agreement states that periodic evaluation review of
6 tenured, tenure-line, and temporary faculty unit employees will include student
7 evaluations (15.23, 15.28-29, 15.32, and 15.34); and
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9 WHEREAS, The CSU, CSU Academic Senate, and CFA Joint Committee “Report on Student
10 Evaluations” (March 12 2008) recommended that “[c]ampuses should use a well-
11 designed student evaluation instrument (with demonstrable validity and
12 reliability) in providing diagnostic information and feedback, and those involved
13 in evaluations should have an understanding of their formative as well as
14 summative uses” (p. 9); and
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16 WHEREAS, The “Report on Student Evaluations” stated that “[t]he faculty on each individual
17 campus have the right, through their governance process, to develop the campus-
18 based program of student evaluations of teaching” (p. 7); and
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20 WHEREAS, The objectives of student evaluations are to contribute to the continuous
21 improvement of instruction and students’ learning; therefore, be it
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23 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate requires that student evaluations include university-
24 wide questions and the opportunity for students to provide written comments on
25 teaching and course effectiveness; and that they may also include (1) college-
26 and/or department-level questions and (2) faculty generated questions; and be it
27 further
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29 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve the Instruction Committee’s report that
30 establishes university-wide student evaluation questions, scale, and metric used
31 for summarization of these questions; and be it further
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33 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate designate the Instruction and Faculty Affairs
34 Committees as the appropriate committees for making potential revisions to

35 university-wide student evaluation questions in the future, and these revisions are
36 subject to approval by the Academic Senate; and be it further
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38 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve that colleges, departments, and/or programs
39 may require the inclusion of additional student evaluation questions, based on
40 their respective faculty-based governance procedures; and be it further
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42 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve that faculty members may include student
43 evaluation questions for their own classes; and be it further
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45 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve that all student responses (numeric and/or
46 written) to faculty generated questions may be excluded from inclusion in the
47 faculty member's personnel action file (PAF) at the discretion of the faculty
48 member; and that any summary measures that may be calculated are not required
49 for inclusion in the faculty member's PAF; and be it further
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51 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve that colleges, departments, and/or programs
52 may require the inclusion of students' written comments, excluding written
53 responses to faculty-generated questions, in a faculty member's personnel action
54 file (PAF), based on their respective faculty-based governance procedures.

Proposed by: Academic Senate Instruction Committee
Date: February 12 2013
Revised: February 19 2013
Revised: March 17 2013
Revised: April 16 2013

**Academic Senate Instruction Committee
Report on Student Evaluations at Cal Poly
February 12 2013**

Background:

In Fall 2013, the Academic Senate Executive Committee, at the request of Provost Kathleen Enz Finken, charged the Instruction Committee to examine the structure of student evaluations at Cal Poly. In particular, the Committee was asked to consider the benefits of university-wide student evaluation questions.

Findings:

The Academic Instruction Committee gathered course evaluations from across the University and compiled their questions in order to identify common evaluation questions. The data were divided between 27 departments across the Colleges Architecture and Environment Design, Liberal Arts, and Science and Mathematics, and three colleges—Colleges of Engineering, Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, and Business—that use common evaluation forms. UNIV evaluation forms were not included because they tend to be focused on specific faculty members teaching the course.

There exists a significant amount of difference between the length and scope of current student evaluations, ranging from 2 questions in one department to over 40 in others.

Since there exists no clear metric to account for comparing college-wide evaluation forms and departmental forms, the information included below distinguishes between the two. The following evaluation questions were the most commonly asked across the University:

1.	Student's class level	3 colleges, 25 depts.
2.	Requirement vs. elective course	3 colleges, 25 depts.
3.	Instructor's overall quality	3 colleges, 21 depts.
4.	Instructor's communication or presentation of material	2 colleges, 18 depts.
5.	Instructor's preparation and/or organization	2 colleges, 15 depts.
6.	Instructor's knowledge of subject matter	1 college, 12 depts.
7.	Student's interest in the course or subject matter	1 college, 12 depts.
8.	Instructor communicated course objectives	1 college, 9 depts.
9.	Overall quality of the course	1 college, 8 depts.
10.	Instructor's interest and/or enthusiasm for the course	1 college, 8 depts.

Recommendations:

After considering the data gathered from across the University and several universities nationwide, the Instruction Committee recommends that the Academic Senate approve two university-wide evaluation questions:

1. Overall, this instructor was educationally effective.
2. Overall, this course was educationally effective.

Limiting the scope of the university-wide questions provides the greatest amount of flexibility for colleges, departments, and faculty to determine the content of student evaluation questions. Since these two questions are summative, the committee recommends that colleges, departments, and faculty should generate discipline specific formative evaluation questions.

The Committee recommends that a five-point Likert-type scale be used for university-wide questions and all numeric student evaluation questions. This scale would be divided as follows: 1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Neither agree nor disagree; 4. Disagree; 5. Strongly disagree. Currently, student evaluation forms used across the University are largely based on such a rating scale (the ratings are typically labeled as A-E, 0-4, or 1-5). The Committee recommends that the University continue to use this same scale in order to provide continuity with previous evaluations and Retention, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) cycles. This will be particularly important when evaluations are administered online rather than the current Scantron forms. The Committee also recommends that any summaries of Likert-scale numeric scores are reported as tabled distributions rather than their mean and standard deviation.

The committee supports the conclusion of the San José State University “Student Opinion of Teaching Effectiveness (SOTE) Guide 2011,” which states that “statistically significant” differences exist between colleges and departments and, “[i]n light of this, it is important that RTP committees evaluating candidates from different departments and colleges (University level RTP) compare instructors to colleagues within their own departments and colleges” (p. 10). The importance of contextualizing student evaluation data has also been supported by the CSU, CSU Academic Senate, and CFA Joint Committee “Report on Student Evaluations” (March 12 2008) and Cal Poly Research and Professional Development Committee (AS-690-09). Such contextualization should also apply to the comparison of the different types of courses (for instance, large lecture courses as opposed to small seminars) to avoid conflating evaluation data from different course settings. Furthermore, data from university-wide questions should not be taken as actionable information as to why a student rated an instructor or course more or less effective. Colleges and departments should ask more specific questions to achieve those kinds of results. This is especially important given that research of student evaluations cautions that using non-contextualized student evaluations for faculty review “remains open for serious debate” (Craig, Merrill, Kline 2012).

State of California
M e m o r a n d u m

CAL POLY
SAN LUIS OBISPO

To: Steven Rein
Chair, Academic Senate

Date: May 23, 2013

From: Jeffrey D. Armstrong
President



Copies: K. Enz Finken
B. Kinsley
D. Stegner

Subject: Response to Academic Senate Resolution AS-759-13
Resolution on Student Evaluations

This memo formally acknowledges receipt and approval of the above-entitled Academic Senate resolution.

Please express my appreciation to the Academic Senate Instruction Committee members for their efforts in this matter.